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AUTHOR Braithwaite, Dawn Ohlendorf; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To determine whether or not disabled persons see communication between themselves and able-bodied persons as different from communication with other disabled persons, telephone interviews were conducted with 27 orthopedically disabled persons. Aside from answering demographic questions, subjects were asked questions regarding when the subject would disclose information about the disability, the reasons for disclosing, and the reasons for not disclosing information about the disability. They were also asked to assess able-bodied and disabled person's communication with them. The telephone interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes, with subjects being given additional time to ask questions or add information if they so desired. A factor analysis of the data revealed that persons with disabilities perceive communication with able-bodied persons as being different from communication with other disabled persons. Disabled persons assess the rewards and costs of the disclosure, the relational importance of the other person, their own comfort, and the other person's comfort in deciding whether to talk about their disabilities. A bibliography and tables are appended. (HOD)

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Ablebodied and Disablebodied Persons' Communication: The Disabled Person's Perspective

by

Dawn Ohlendorf Braithwaite
University of Minnesota

Robert A. Emry
California State University, Fullerton

and

Richard L. Wiseman
California State University, Fullerton

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Ablebodied and Disabled Persons' Communication:

The Disabled Person's Perspective

ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on the communication between ablebodied and disabled persons revealed that these encounters are often problematic and characterized by uncertainty for ablebodied persons. This research, however, rarely investigates the perceptions of persons with disabilities; the present study attempted to ameliorate this situation. Our first purpose was to ascertain if disabled persons perceive their communication with ablebodied persons as different from their communication with other disabled persons. Consistent with past research, our sample of persons with disabilities did perceive a difference. Our second purpose was to determine disabled persons' uses and functions of disclosures regarding their disabilities. A factor analysis of the data revealed that disabled persons assess the rewards and costs of the disclosure, the relational importance of the other person, their own comfort, and the other person's comfort in deciding whether to talk about their disabilities. The implications of these findings for current and future research are then discussed.

Ablebodied and Disabled Persons' Communication:

The Disabled Person's Perspective

> Why can't people see me as someone who has a handicap rather than someone who is handicapped? . . . Why can't I make anyone understand what it's like to be handicapped? . . . All this, then, is the burden that we the physically handicapped in particular carry. In every interaction, our baggage includes not only our infirmity but the sense of infirmity we evoke in others and their consequent incapacity to deal with us. (Zola, 1982, pp. 200, 202)

Securing acceptance is a major problem for the 11 million disabled Americans between the ages of 16 and 64. Persons who are disabled or otherwise seen as different from the norms of society often find themselves cut off from the larger society and, at times, forced into a subculture of their own. According to Dahnke, the disabled constitute a minority group that is blocked from "meaningful social discourse with nonhandicapped persons" and "integration into the productive mainstream of society" (1982, p. 92). Although the person with a disability experiences physical barriers to meaningful social contact and participation in society, psychological factors seem to be the most significant barrier.

The limiting effect of psychological factors can be seen in disabled and ablebodied communicative relationships. On balance, being disabled has a negative effect on relationships and communication between disabled and ablebodied persons (Farina, Sherman, & Allen, 1968; Kleck, 1966, 1968, 1969; Thompson, 1982). The disability takes on a social meaning which impinges on both the disabled and the ablebodied communicator and results in strained communicative experiences (Deegan, 1977). These strained communicative

experiences are partly an artifact of social stereotypes of the disabled persons (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Heinemann, Pellander, Vogelbusch, & Wojtek, 1981; Weinberg, 1978), of conflicting norms regarding the social treatment of the disabled person (Deegan, 1977; Kelley, Hastorf, Jones, Thibaut, & Usdane, 1960; Langer, Fiske, Taylor, & Chanowitz, 1976; Tucker, 1980), and a lack of contact with and information about the disabled (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Dailey & Halpin, 1981; Donaldson, 1980; Evans, 1976; Gliedman & Roth, 1980; Gosse & Sheppard, 1979; Higgs, 1972; Stainback, Stainback, & Jaben, 1981; Yerxa, 1971). These factors taken together generate atypically high levels of uncertainty when ablebodied persons initially interact with disabled persons (Dahnke, 1982).

As we will see from our review of the literature on ablebodied and disabled persons' communication, this area has rich implications for communication theory. However, two related problems seem to pervade current research. First, researchers talk about persons with disabilities, not to them. Not only are persons with disabilities talked about, but the research is most often conducted from the perspective of persons with ablebodies, for example, how persons with ablebodies feel when communicating with those with disabilities. Therefore, this study will attempt to ascertain whether or not disabled persons perceive communication with ablebodied persons differently than they perceive communication with other disabled persons. Second, research on the use of disclosure about the disability as an image management strategy seems to also be contaminated with this ethnocentrism. That is, research tends to examine how the disclosure reduces the tension in the ablebodied person, while ignoring the possible costs or risks of the disclosure for the disabled person. Thus, our research will try to ameliorate this situation

by examining how disabled persons view disclosures about their disabilities.

Disabled/Ablebodied Persons' Communication

Initial communication is characterized by stereotypic behavior. Persons' responses "reflect only the most superficial aspects of their personality, are often cloaked in cliches, reflect socially desirable modes of responses, and demonstrate little personal uniqueness" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 136). Moreover, when this initial communication occurs in a situation characterized by high uncertainty, persons behave in more constrained and less spontaneous ways. Kelley et al. (1960) suggest that the ablebodied person's behavior toward the disabled person is, indeed, constrained, overly self-conscious, overly controlled, and overly rigid because of the uncertainty, discomfort, and ambiguity of the situation. Other research has advanced similar findings.

The ablebodied person tends to be more inhibited (Kleck, Ono, & Hastorf, 1966) and nervous (Thompson & Seibold, 1978) when communicating with a disabled person than when communicating with other ablebodied persons. Ablebodied persons also demonstrate increased physical distance (Kleck, 1969; Worthington, 1974), anxiety (Mannelli & Kelz, 1973), and emotional discomfort (Kleck, 1968). These communicative experiences can result in the use of fewer nonverbal cues and are terminated more quickly (Comer & Piliavin, 1972; Kleck, 1969). Moreover, it is probable that the ablebodied person will verbally communicate a positive response to the disabled (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Langer et al., 1976), yet nonverbally communicate rejection and/or avoidance (Dahnke, 1982; Deegan, 1977; Heinemann et al., 1981; Langer et al., 1976). Overall, ablebodied persons avoid communication with the disabled (Thompson, 1982), are less likely to select a disabled person as a friend

(Farina et al., 1968), and evaluate the disabled person negatively (Thompson, 1982) or at least as being different (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Heinemann et al., 1981).

In addition, ablebodied persons distort their position and opinions to be consistent with their stereotype of what the disabled person wants to hear (Kleck et al., 1966). Similarly, ablebodied persons assume that a physical disability disrupts more activities than it actually does. In essence, stereotypes of the disabled are employed to assess the disabilities of a particular person with disabilities (Thompson, 1981). Deegan (1977) maintains that any deviant behavior caused by the physical disability "spreads" across the person and is attributed to the person rather than to the disability.

Some research findings demonstrate that ablebodied behavior negatively affects the disabled person. Meissner, Thoreson, and Butler (1967) found that the disabled person has a lower self-esteem than most ablebodied persons. A similar position is maintained by Linkowski and Dunn (1974) and Morgan and Leung (1980). Others argue that because of ablebodied behavior, disabled persons have few opportunities to develop role-taking skills (Gresham, 1983; Ingwell, Thoreson, & Smits, 1967; Kitano, Stiehl, & Cole, 1978) and interpersonal sensitivity (Kelley et al., 1960). Other research has found that disabled and ablebodied communication is costly to both parties (Thompson & Siebold, 1978). As a result of these mutual costs, the disabled are "social isolates, poorer communicators, . . . and are the receivers of less empathic and appropriate communication" (Thompson, 1981, p. 6).

Clearly, one can conclude that disabled and ablebodied communication is problematic, at least, based on the perceptions of the ablebodied person.

The first purpose of the present research is to determine whether or not disabled persons see communication between themselves and ablebodied persons as different than communication with other disabled persons.

Disclosure

Communication between disabled and ablebodied persons can best be characterized by high mutual costs as a result of high levels of uncertainty. One strategy the disabled person can use to manage the uncertainty in initial communication with the ablebodied is to disclose information about the disability (Goffman, 1963; Thompson, 1982; White, Wright, & Dembo, 1948). We will examine the use of this strategy in light of the findings of self-disclosure research and the recent research on the disclosure of disabilities.

Self-Disclosure Paradigm

Berger and Calabrese (1975) argue that disclosure reduces uncertainty and is generally considered to be important in relational escalation (Gilbert, 1976; Pearce, Wright, Sharp, & Slama, 1975; Wheeless, 1976). More specifically, Gilbert (1976) argues that self-disclosure is a tool in helping to determine the direction of interpersonal relationships.

Self-disclosure is often related to relational escalation, interpersonal attraction, trust, and affection (Cozby, 1973; Gilbert, 1976), which can be considered relational rewards. In fact, Morse and Phelps (1980) suggest that the four variables of self-disclosure, trust, feedback, and empathy result in the relational costs of risk, rejection, and misunderstanding (Rubin, 1973).

This paradoxical tension between relational costs and rewards is demonstrated by the research on self-disclosure. There is a positive relationship between disclosure and attraction toward the discloser in conditions of

reciprocal disclosure and in situations where disclosure is perceived by the recipient as a social reward (Fitzgerald, 1963; Gilbert, 1976; Worthy, 1969). Furthermore, the perceiver must see the disclosure as appropriate behavior (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Kiesler, Kiesler, & Pallak, 1967). Disclosure of positive information increases the attractiveness of the discloser (Blau, 1964; Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975) and liking (Cozby, 1972, 1973) for the discloser.

Conversely, inappropriate levels of self-disclosure result in the discloser being viewed as less attractive (Chaikan & Derlege, 1974; Culbert, 1968; Weigel, Dinges, Dyer, & Straum-Fjord, 1972) or as having no significant effect on his/her attractiveness (Cozby, 1973; Erlich & Graeven, 1971; Jourard & Landsman, 1960). Perhaps the most accurate relationship between disclosure and relational costs/rewards is a curvilinear one, with the greatest rewards resulting from the disclosure of information of medium intimacy (Byrne, 1969; Cozby, 1972, 1973). Jourard (1959, 1964) proposed that low levels of self-disclosure are indicative of repression of self and inability to grow as a person, while too much self-disclosure indicates maladjustment and preoccupation with self. Inappropriately high disclosures, then, reduce relational rewards (Gilbert, 1976).

Disclosures of Disabilities Research

One way the disabled person can manage the uncertainty experiences in initial communications with ablebodied persons is to disclose information about the disability. Thompson (1982) reports that the consequences of disclosure are not all positive in ablebodied and disabled persons' communicative encounters. Yet, she concludes that "there does, however, seem to be a

rationale for investigating the impact of disclosure about a disability on 'mixed' interactions" (1982, p. 197). Thompson advances this conclusion based on a review of eight studies which examined the hypothesis that disclosure about a disability would improve communication between the ablebodied and the disabled persons (Bazakas, 1979; Farina et al., 1968; Hall, 1963; Hastorf et al., 1979; Kleck et al., 1966; Thompson, 1975, 1972; Thompson & Seibold, 1977).

Thompson (1982) suggests that self-disclosure by disabled persons is an effective tool for image management because (1) disclosure will limit uncertainty and (2) disclosure will let the ablebodied person know how the disabled person feels about their disability; i.e., that they are not overly sensitive about the disability. In fact, Thompson suggests that "there are few imaginable instances when such disclosures could lead to a loss of control, hurt the other person, or when it would be of more benefit to lie about the disability" (1982, p. 201).

Coming from an ablebodied perspective, it is difficult to disagree with Thompson's assertions nor is it important to question the validity of these observations. At the same time, however, the utility of these strategies as a tool for the disabled person needs to be assessed. Have the disabled person's experiences with disclosure resulted in increased understanding and acceptance on the part of the ablebodied person or in increased relational costs, such as misunderstanding or manipulation?

When communicating with the ablebodied, social comparison theory predicts that the disabled person may find disclosures about the disability leading to "comparisons between themselves and normals to be highly unflattering to themselves, and as such will cease making such comparisons [by] utilizing

denial mechanisms and perceptual defense" (Ingwell et al., 1967). Once again, the approach to understanding and improving communication between the ablebodied and disabled persons is from the perspective of the ablebodied person. The purpose of the present research is to attempt to ascertain the disabled persons' perspective on the disclosure of their disabilities.

METHODS

Sample

Based upon a survey of informed individuals in a mid-western community, a sample of orthopedically disabled individuals was compiled. Twenty-seven disabled individuals were asked to participate in the study and all 27 agreed to do so. Subsequent analyses are based upon these subjects. The demographic statistics are as follows: 70.4% were between 18-35 years of age; 51.9% were students; 48.1% were male; and 22.2% had their disabilities since birth.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained demographic questions, e.g., age, occupation. The second section asked questions regarding when the subject would disclose information about the disability, the reasons for disclosing, and the reasons for not disclosing information about the disability. These reasons for disclosure/nondisclosure of the disability were extracted from the self-disclosure literature (e.g., Pearce & Sharp, 1973) and the research on disclosure as an image management technique (Thompson, 1983). The response categories for the reasons for disclosure/non-disclosure were coded on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The last section of the questionnaire asked the subjects to assess ablebodied and disabled person's communication with them. For example, does

the ablebodied person tend to look away, act nervous, or end the conversation quickly? The six communication behaviors that the subjects made their assessments on were drawn from past research on the communication between ablebodied and disabled persons (e.g., Kleck, 1968). The response categories for these assessments were coded on a five-point scale from very frequently to never.

Procedure

Subjects were interviewed by telephone during a three-week period by the principal investigator and one trained research assistant, a student majoring in therapeutic recreation. The questionnaire was pretested on three subjects, all persons with disabilities, and then subsequent revisions were made. The telephone interviews lasted approximately twenty-five minutes, with subjects being given additional time to ask questions or add information if they so desired.

Statistical Analysis

As suggested by our research questions, our first analysis will attempt to determine whether disabled persons perceive any differences in the way ablebodied vs. disabled persons communicate with them. This analysis will be accomplished through paired *t*-tests. The next research question focuses on the disabled person's reasons for disclosure/nondisclosure of information about their disabilities. Since many of the reasons are interrelated, a factor analysis of the data should reveal a parsimonious representation of the reasons why disabled persons talk or do not talk about their disabilities.

RESULTS

Ablebodied vs. Disabled Person's Communication

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and *t*-tests for the assessments of ablebodied and disabled person's communication. The subjects

perceived that all six of the negative communication behaviors occurred more frequently in ablebodied interactions. Specifically, the disabled subjects felt that ablebodied communicators more frequently glanced away ($t = 6.67$, $p < .001$), stood further away ($t = 4.49$, $p < .001$), acted nervous ($t = 6.15$, $p < .001$), ended the conversation early ($t = 2.80$, $p < .009$), pretended to ignore the disability ($t = 3.12$, $p < .004$), and assumed that the subject was more disabled than he/she actually was ($t = 5.00$, $p < .001$), than did disabled communicators. It would seem that there are indeed differences in the way ablebodied individuals communicate with the disabled. The question now is whether disabled persons use disclosure to help reduce these differences by reducing the ablebodied person's discomfort and uncertainty about communicating with the disabled person.

Reasons for Disclosure/Nondisclosure

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the reasons for disclosure or nondisclosure of information about the disability. In regards to why our disabled subjects choose to talk about the disability, the two reasons obtaining the greatest agreement was to reduce the ablebodied person's discomfort and for practical reasons (e.g., to get help or assistance). In regards to why the subjects choose not to disclose information about their disabilities, the reasons receiving the most agreement were that the disabled person did not want the ablebodied person's sympathy, the disabled person felt it was none of the ablebodied person's business, the disabled person did not want to make the ablebodied person uncomfortable, and the disabled person felt that the ablebodied person was not interested in him/her. Based upon these descriptive data, it would seem the disabled persons are weighing the relational costs and rewards of disclosing information about their disability to ablebodied

individuals. A factor analysis of these data should reveal the criteria the disabled subjects are using in making these assessments.

One of the first steps in a factor analysis is to determine the number of nonspurious factors. This was accomplished using Cattell's (1966) Scree Test which basically entails plotting the eigenvalues of the factors and then isolating an "elbow" or scree in the plot. The eigenvalues for the first eight factors were: 3.07, 2.75, 2.05, 1.54, 1.32, 1.22, .89, and .75. A plot of these eigenvalues indicated that a four-factor solution would best characterize the data.

The next step was to determine the best rotational solution for the four factors. Twenty-two different oblique rotations were examined. Using Thurstone's (1947) criteria for a simple structure, the best solution proved to be a somewhat orthogonal solution; the mean of the factor intercorrelations was .11. For those familiar with the SPSS package (Nie et al., 1975), delta was equal to +.4. The resultant factor pattern matrix is provided in Table 3. This matrix was used to accomplish the last step in factor analysis, viz., the interpretation of the factors.

Factor 1. The first factor accounted for 35% of the common variance in reasons for disclosure/nondisclosure. The reasons having high (i.e., over .40) positive loadings on this factor were: I would not disclose because it would make me feel inferior (loading = .84), I would not disclose because I was taught not to talk about my disability (.80), and I would not disclose because the ablebodied person wouldn't understand me (.44). The one item having a high negative loading was: I would disclose because I think I should be open about my disability (-.51). Since one end of this factor connotes a negative or closed attitude toward disclosure and the other end of the

continuum connotes a positive or open attitude toward disclosure, this factor seems to be distinguishing individuals having an Open vs. Cautious Attitude toward Disclosure.

Factor 2. The second factor accounted for 29% of the common variance in the items. Three reasons had high loadings on this factor: I wouldn't disclose because I don't think it is important to the relationship (.71), I wouldn't disclose because I don't want the ablebodied person's sympathy (.65), and I wouldn't disclose because it is none of their business (.41). Since no items had high negative loadings on this factor, we would have to infer that the negative end of this continuum would be comprised of items that would be opposite to the positive loading items, e.g., that the disabled person would disclose because it is important to the relationship. Therefore, this factor seems to be capturing the Relational Importance vs. Unimportance of the disclosure for the disabled person.

Factor 3. The third factor accounted for 22% of the common variance among the reasons for disclosure/nondisclosure about their disabilities. Four items had high loadings on this particular factor: I wouldn't disclose because I don't want to make myself uncomfortable (.73), I wouldn't disclose because it is private information (.62), I would talk about my disabilities in order to reduce my own discomfort (.59), and I would disclose in order to determine the ablebodied person's attitude (.54). The first three items all seem to be self-oriented and the last, while showing a concern about other, seems to have self-interests at stake. Given this logic, we decided to label this factor, Self-Directed Disclosure.

Factor 4. The last factor extracted accounted for 14% of the common variance among the items. Only two items loaded highly on this last factor:

I would disclose about my disability in order to break the ice with an ablebodied person (.93) and I would talk about my disability in order to reduce the ablebodied person's discomfort (.59). In contrast to the prior factor, this one seems to be capturing Other-Directed Disclosure, i.e., disclosure of the disability in order to comfort or ease the tensions of the other.

Factor Intercorrelations. As mentioned earlier, the factors proved to be near-orthogonal, i.e., the factors had low to nil correlations. Two factor correlations are noteworthy however. First, the Open/Cautious Attitude toward Disclosure (Factor 1) was negatively correlated ($r = -.21$) with Other-Directed Disclosure (Factor 4), suggesting that the more open the attitude toward disclosure by the disabled person, the more likely the disabled person would engage in other-directed disclosure. Second, there was a negative correlation ($r = -.19$) between perceptions of the disclosure's Relational Importance/Unimportance (Factor 2) and the Other-Directedness of the disclosure (Factor 4). This result suggests that when the disabled persons perceive the disclosure as more relationally important, the greater the use of the disclosure to reduce the tensions of the ablebodied person; conversely, the less the perception of the relational importance of the disclosure, the less the other-directed use of the disclosure.

DISCUSSION

We found that our sample of persons with disabilities perceive communication with ablebodied persons as being different that communication with other persons with disabilities. This finding is consistent with previous research findings which have focused on the behavior of ablebodied persons when communicating with persons with a disability. The results of this study and

previous research results are taken as evidence that disabled and ablebodied communication encounters are problematic for both disabled and ablebodied participants. The fact that disabled persons also see such encounters as problematic has both negative and positive implications. That is, disabled persons perceive this difference yet do not or cannot change their communicative experiences with the ablebodied. Comer and Piliavin (1972) noted that disabled persons and ablebodied confederates interacted a shorter period of time, evoked less motoric activity and smiling behavior from disabled person, and had less eye contact than did interactions between disabled persons and disabled confederates. Furthermore, there was a tendency for disabled persons to distort their responses toward the ablebodied's stereotype of the disabled. Comer and Piliavin (1972) argue the results of their study demonstrate that disabled persons contribute to the "pathology" of the interaction between disabled and ablebodied persons. Clark, Weiman and Paschall have labeled the disabled person's contribution to this "pathology" as "learned helplessness" and found that those disabled persons who see themselves as "shy have a propensity to want to be helped" (1983, p. 157). Therefore, it is highly probable that disabled persons help create the problematic nature of disabled and ablebodied communicative encounters. Moreover, in this study the disabled persons perceived that they were not recipients of appropriate and perhaps empathetic communication when communicating with ablebodied persons. Thompson (1981) found similar results. Therefore the negative implications suggest that disabled persons may participate in creating problematic communicative encounters with ablebodied persons. Secondly, disabled persons probably are the recipients of less appropriate and empathetic communication than are ablebodied persons.

Yet positive implications can be noted as well as negative ones. Disabled persons perceive their communication with other disabled persons as positive and rewarding. Disabled persons have been labeled as social isolates (Clark et al., 1983; Thompson, 1981). The results of this study question the appropriateness of labeling disabled persons as social isolates. Rather it may be more appropriate to view disabled persons in communicative relationship with other disabled persons based on perceived similarity, empathy, and mutual rewards. Moreover, perceived similarities, empathy and mutual reward systems seem to result in a cultural identity. Finally, this finding also suggests that persons with disabilities are not totally lacking in social perception skills. That is, persons with disabilities were able to perceive a difference between ablebodied and disabled communicative behavior. In addition, this finding is taken as evidence that the disabled do compare themselves with ablebodied persons rather than simply employing denial mechanism and perceptual defenses. Perhaps persons with disabilities and ablebodied persons communication is problematic for persons with disabilities not because they find it difficult to compare themselves with ablebodied persons or because they lack social perception skills, but rather because they lack communication skills necessary to manage their culturally different communication relationships with ablebodied persons.

Besides an investigation of disabled persons' perceptions of the communication of ablebodied and disabled persons, a second motivation of this present study was to ascertain disabled persons' uses and functions of disclosures regarding their disabilities. We found that our sample of persons with disabilities made four discriminations in their reasons for disclosing or not disclosing in a particular situation: (1) their openness/

cautiousness about disclosing, (2) the perceived relational importance of the disclosure, (3) the perceived relevance of the disclosure in enhancing one's own comfort, and (4) the perceived relevance of the disclosure in enhancing the ablebodied person's comfort. Each of these dimensions has theoretical importance.

First, when disabled persons are faced with a possible disclosure situation they are guided by two conflicting normative prescriptions: to be open and frank about their disabilities or to avoid the costs of disclosure by not talking about their disabilities. Nearly all of the research on the disclosure about disabilities has focused on the positive aspects of the disclosure (see Donaldson, 1980; Thompson, 1982). Usually, these positive aspects are in terms of the benefits to the ablebodied person, e.g., reducing their uncertainty, easing their tension; rarely do studies investigate the possible risks and costs entailed in disclosing for the disabled person.

Our results suggest that feelings of inferiority and misunderstandings can result from disclosures regarding our subjects' disabilities. There are several plausible explanations for these perceptions: (1) Disclosure regarding their disabilities may result in the disabled person as being perceived as helpless or sick, thereby crystalizing culture's stereotype of the disability as a diseaselike condition. As Gliedman and Roth suggest, culture's insistence that the disabled person rely on others for help "turns into a permanent denial of a person's rights and dignity as a human being" (1980, p. 41). It is interesting to note that many of our subjects complained that ablebodied persons tried to assume a one-up helper role without even asking or being solicited for help. (2) Because of limited and overly rigid interactions,

ablebodied persons may not be able to empathize with the disabled person; instead they react sympathetically to the disclosure. This, in turn, may cause the disability to become the sole basis for judging the person with a disability (Goffman, 1963). As one subject mentioned, the reason why she would not disclose is that she "wants to be seen equally and as a whole" (Subject #16). (3) Lastly, because the disabled persons have restricted opportunities to interact with ablebodied persons, they may be less adept at knowing when and how to disclose (Thompson & Seibold, 1978). Thus, inappropriately timed disclosures may have resulted in negative reactions on the part of the ablebodied person (Donaldson, 1980).

While the first dimension seems to be distinguishing general rewards and costs from disclosure, the remaining three factors seem to be concerned with situational contingencies that mitigate the use or nonuse of disclosure. In essence, persons with disabilities judge the value of the disclosure to the relationship with the ablebodied person, to their own confort with communicating with the ablebodied person, and to the ablebodied person's comfort in communicating with them. Since these are all continuums, it should be noted that if the disabled person sees no value of the disclosure in terms of these three factors, then he/she would probably choose not to disclose information regarding their disabilities.

The value of the disclosure for relational development has been investigated by several researchers. Pablant (1977) suggests that disclosure must be appropriate to the nature of the relationship before positive outcomes will result from talking about the disability. Specifically, Pablant postulates the relationship must be a friendship that has a relatively high degree of openness in order for the disclosure to have "functional social and emotional

value" (1977, p. 372). In the same vein, Weinberg (1978) emphasized that positive relational outcomes will result only when the interaction illustrates the similarity between the disabled and ablebodied persons.

Our third factor, i.e., the value of the disclosure in reducing the disabled person's uncertainty or tension, is also significant to our disabled subjects in deciding whether or not to talk about their disabilities. As one subject stated when asked why he would disclose, "I want to gauge the other person's reaction and to show them I'm a person also. This helps educate people and creates a good impression about the disabled" (Subject #46). The intended result of disclosure seems to be an ego-defensive one (Katz, 1967), i.e., the individual wishes to portray a positive self-image to the other person and to determine the other's reaction to this presentation of self. Evans contends that this form of disclosure is important because disabled persons "should assume control of the social environment around them by creating a positive image and displaying behaviors that lead to positive, accepting attitudes on the part of the nondisabled population" (1976, p. 578).

The last factor was concerned with the value of the disclosure for reducing the ablebodied person's tensions and uncertainty about interacting with disabled persons. Of all of the findings in the present study, this one has been the one most researched in the literature. As mentioned earlier, the reason for the wealth of research may be due to a subtle ethnocentric bias in our investigations of disability-disclosure, i.e., we seem to be more concerned with the ablebodied person's perceptions and feelings rather than the disabled person's ones. Ironically, being the last factor extracted, we can conclude that this reason for disclosure/nondisclosure is one of lesser importance in the minds of persons with disabilities. Even though there seems to be an

imbalance in the orientation of past research and the orientation of our disabled subjects in terms of this reason for disclosure, we can infer that our subjects consider this situational factor when deciding whether to talk about their disabilities.

We have argued that current research tends to focus on the feelings, attitudes and behaviors of ablebodied persons when they are communicating with disabled persons. This same research has found that disabled/ablebodied communication encounters are problematic and characterized by high uncertainty for ablebodied persons and perhaps disabled persons as well. The first purpose of our study was to ascertain if disabled persons perceive their communication with ablebodied persons as different from their communication with other disabled persons. We found that our sample of persons with disabilities did perceive this difference. The second purpose of this study was to determine disabled persons' uses and functions of disclosures regarding their disabilities as an uncertainty reduction and image management strategy. The results suggest that four factors characterize disabled persons' disclosive behavior: Open vs. Cautious Attitude Toward Disclosure; Relational Importance vs. Unimportance; Self-Directed Disclosure; and Other-Directed Disclosure. Moreover these factors suggest that disabled persons' disclosive behavior is situationally determined. That is, disabled persons assess both the rewards and costs of disclosure, the relational importance of the other person and their own comfort as well as the other person's comfort before disclosing about their disability.

We recommend that future researchers on disabled and ablebodied communication not talk about persons with disabilities but rather talk with them. By focusing on the perceptions of disabled persons, we believe that such research

would help ameliorate an ethnocentric bias characteristic of past research. Specifically, we believe that three future research foci are suggested by the present study. First, the assumption that disclosure regarding disabilities is a panacea for the communication problems encountered by ablebodied and disabled persons is questioned by the results of the present study. Future research needs to examine both the rewards and costs of disclosure for the disabled person. Second, research needs to examine the social rules governing disclosure from both the ablebodied and disabled persons' perspectives. For example, what should the content of the disclosure consist of and how should the disclosure be presented. A comparison of ablebodied and disabled persons' reactions to disclosures may shed light on these social rules. Lastly, future research needs to examine the situational dynamics influencing disclosure regarding disabilities. The present research suggests that the type of relationship between the ablebodied and disabled persons and their comfort levels may be important situational dynamics. By undertaking these research suggestions, we may help minimize the handicapping of disabled persons by ablebodied communicators and researchers.

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TABLE 1

Comparison of Ablebodied vs Disabled Persons' Behaviors toward Disabled Persons

Behavior	Group*	Mean**	s.d.	t	p
Glances Away	AB	2.82	.83	6.67	.001
	DA	1.78	.58		
Stands Away	AB	2.82	.92	4.49	.001
	DA	1.89	.80		
Acts Nervous	AB	3.11	.97	6.15	.001
	DA	1.93	.87		
Ends Conversation Early	AB	2.52	.80	2.80	.009
	DA	2.04	.76		
Pretends to Ignore My Disability	AB	2.52	.70	3.12	.004
	DA	2.04	.98		
Assumes More Disabled Than I Am	AB	3.59	.97	5.00	.001
	DA	2.15	.95		

* AB stands for ablebodied person; DA stands for disabled person.

** The larger the mean, the more frequent the behavior.

TABLE 2

Reasons for Disclosure/Nondisclosure of Disability

Reasons for Disclosure	Mean*	s.d.
Reduce own discomfort	2.59	1.28
Reduce other's discomfort	4.11	1.09
Openness about disability	3.95	1.00
Break the ice	3.33	1.24
Practical reasons	4.33	.62
Determine other's attitude	3.26	1.10
Reasons for Nondisclosure		
None of their business	3.15	1.26
Not important to relationship	2.85	1.29
Don't want their sympathy	3.85	1.03
They are not interested	3.04	1.09
Makes me feel inferior	1.74	.90
Taught not to talk about dis.	1.56	.75
Don't want to make other uncomfortable	3.07	1.21
Don't want to make self uncomfortable	2.15	1.17
Private information	2.89	1.12
They wouldn't understand me	2.48	.89

*The larger the mean, the greater the agreement with the item.

TABLE 3

Factor Pattern Matrix

	Factors			
Reasons for Disclosure	1	2	3	4
Reduce own discomfort	.15	.10	.59*	.12
Reduce other's discomfort	-.03	.27	.03	.59*
Openness about disability	-.51*	-.22	.03	.12
Break the ice	-.14	-.00	.07	.93*
Practical reasons	-.06	.17	.39	-.10
Determine other's attitude	-.18	-.07	.54*	.06
Reasons for Nondisclosure				
None of their business	-.03	.41*	.32	-.17
Not important to relationship	-.01	.71*	.14	.04
Don't want their sympathy	..04	.65*	-.09	.27
They are not interested	.39	.39	-.00	-.27
Makes me feel inferior	.84*	-.24	-.04	-.02
Taught not to talk about dis.	.81*	-.12	-.10	-.05
Don't want to make other uncomfortable	.38	-.13	.24	.03
Don't want to make self uncomfortable	.28	-.32	.73*	.21
Private information	-.18	.22	.62*	-.31
They wouldn't understand me	.44*	.17	-.02	.04

*Items used to interpret factor.